DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 311 376 CG 021 991

AUTHOR	Hittleman, Margo
TITLE	What's a Kid To Do about Child Abuse?
INSTITUTION	Cornell Univ., Ithaca, N.Y. Dept of Human Development and Family Studies.
SPONS AGENCY	Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	Apr 86
NOTE	47p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Cornell University Distribution Center, 7 Research Park, Ithaca, NY 14850 ($1.40, includes shipping and handling 10-24 copies, less 20% shipping and handling; 25+ copies, less 30% shipping and handling).
PUB TYPE	Guides - General (050)
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Adolescents; *Child Abuse; Childrens Rights; Coping; *Parent Child Relationship; *Preadolescents; Responses; Runaways; *Sexual Abuse; Victims of Crime

ABSTRACT

This booklet discusses child abuse, targeting pre-teenagers and teenagers. It describes what child abuse is, why it happens, and what a teenager can do about it. These topics are covered: (1) definition of child abuse and types of child abuse; (2) differentiating between child abuse and discipline; (3) sexual abuse; (4) family types of child abusers; (5) why parents abuse; (6) how abuse affects a teenager; (7) how to determine if a teenager is abused; (8) what to do if a teenager is abused; (9) what happens if a teenager tells about abuse; (10) child abuse and the law; (11) child abuse hotlines; (12) what happens to parents when they are reported; (13) teenagers' rights and responsibilities; (14) changes and choices after child abuse reporting; (15) feeling trapped and running away; (16) coping with child abuse through saying "no," staying out of the way, doing things to feel good, and talking it out; (17) finding help in the community; (18) helping a friend who is abused; (19) preventing abuse; and (20) finding out more about child abuse. The booklet contains short vignettes and drawings relevant to the particular topics. Toll-free national telephone numbers for the National Runaway Switchboard, Runaway Hotline, Childhelp USA, and Parents Anonymous are included. (ABL)

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What's A Kid To Do

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About Child Abuse?

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This booklet was produced by the Family Life Development Center, Department of Human Development and Family Studies, New York State College of Human Ecology, Cornell University, with funding from Health Education Service, Inc., Albany, NY. Technical support and advice were provided by Oscar W. Larson III and Rebekah Dorman of ESCAPE, a Family Life Development Center child abuse prevention project funded by the U.S. Department of Education and the Migrant Unit, New York State Education Department. Additional support for production and distribution was provided by STAR and Parents & School Partnerships, both Family Life Development Center child abuse projects funded by the Office of Human Development Services, U. S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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What's A Kid To Do

About Child Abuse?

By Margo Hittleman

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people answered questions, sent information, and shared their ideas, enthusiasm, and encouragement with me; I offer them all my sincere appreciation.

I am indebted to the following individuals who, in addition to reviewing various drafts, helped me to think about the project: Naomi Barber, Parents-School Partnership Project, Bronx, N.Y.; Florence Cherry, Department of Human Development and Family Studies, Cornell University; Barbara Hopkins, Girl Scouts of America; Polly Joan, Tompkins County Suicide Prevention and Crisis Service; Mary Lu McPheron, Tompkins County Child Protective Services; Louise Miller, Tompkins County Child Sexual Abuse Project; Michael Nunno, Child Protective Services Training Institute, Cornell University; Brad Pollock, Groton Central School District; and the parents and staff of Bronx Community School District 10.

My thanks also to Sloan Sheridan and the students at Dewitt Middle School, Ithaca, N.Y.; the fifth and sixth grade students at Groton Elementary School; the students in Community School District 10, Bronx, N.Y.; and the members of the Tompkins County Child Sexual Abuse Support Group. Many of their ideas and suggestions are reflected here.

I am especially grateful to Frank Barry and Rosaleen Mazur of the Family Life Development Center at Cornell University for their guidance, encouragement, and support throughout this entire project.

-Margo Hittleman

DEAR READER:

This booklet has been written for kids who are teenagers or who are almost teenagers. It talks about child abuse -- what it is, why it happens, and what you can do about it if you are being abused or know someone who is being abused.

This booklet has a lot of information. It may be hard to read all at once. Look through the Table of Contents on the next page and find the sections that sound most interesting to you. Start with these; then go on to the other sections.

For some of you, this booklet will describe things that happen in your family. If so, I hope you will use the sections on how to find help. For others, it will help you to understand a little more about the problem of child abuse and neglect. It may help you to help a friend.

A NOTE TO ADULTS

Being a parent is often frustrating and sometimes overwhelming. Any of us can find ourselves under so much stress that we start to act in ways that we later wish we hadn't. When parents find themselves under more stress than they can handle, their children may suffer as a result. When things become so difficult that parents find themselves losing control and taking their frustration out on their children, it is important to ask for help.

Many places offer help and support to parents. Parents Anonymous is a self-help group for parents who are having problems dealing with their children. Their toll-free, 24-hour hotline number is listed on the last page of this booklet. The hotline offers someone to talk with parents and information about local chapters.

Most communities offer classes and workshops especially for parents of teenagers on communication, discipline, and the changes that families face as kids grow up. Good places to check for information are public libraries, churches or synagogues, community centers, local colleges, or a Cooperative Extension office.

The section of this booklet, "Preventing Abuse" offers additional suggestions about ways that parents and kids can work, together, to decrease family conflict and to deal with conflicts when they do arise.

If you know a young person who is being abused, you can help by listening without judgement and letting him/her know that you care. Talk about the information in this booklet; encourage him/her to think of possible solutions to the problem and to choose one. Let him/her know that you are concerned and want to help.

In some states, any adult suspecting that a child is being abused or neglected is required by law to report his or her concerns. Even if you are not legally required to make a report, you may wish to do so. After all, help can be provided to the family only after their needs are known. You need only a reasonable suspicion to file a report, not proof. It is up to trained child protective professionals to determine what is happening in a family, how serious it is, and what help is needed. In many states, you may file a report anonymously. The hotline or other reporting number is usually listed on the inside cover of your telephone book.

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My Dad treats me like a punching bag. If he's had a bad day, I know that I'm going to get it. Sometimes he doesn't even seem to need a reason to beat up on me. It's a wonder my brains aren't scrambled from all this knocking around.

Sean, 15

My father has been messing with me for as long as I can remember. He used to just lie in bed with me at night. Then, he started to touch me under my nightgown. Now he says I have to have sex with him or he'll start messing with my little sister.

Jenny, 13

My parents keep track of where I am every minute of the day. If I'm even five minutes late coming home from school, I know I'm going to get whipped. But the worst part is when they go out. They lock me in the closet until they get home. They say that it's to keep me out of trouble.

Jeff, 11

Mama doesn't care what I do - - as long as I make sure that my little sisters are fed. She's too busy running around with her boyfriend. She isn't even home enough to know if I'm there at night. My friends think I'm lucky to have so much freedom. But sometimes I wish she'd take care of me the way mothers are supposed to.

Wanda, 14

Child abuse isn't something that happens only to little kids. Almost half the reported cases of child abuse and neglect involve teenagers. Some kids who are abused by their parents have been abused for as long as they can remember; for other kids, the abuse started when they got older.

People have started to talk openly about child abuse only recently. In the past, most people thought that raising kids was a family's private business. Now, many people realize that parents sometimes need extra help to make a safe home for their children. As people learn more about the problem, it's easier for kids who are being abused to get help.

WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE?

When parents or step-parents hurt their children's bodies or feelings over and over again -- on purpose -- it's called child abuse. It's also child abuse when someone else (like a relative, older brother or sister, or family friend) hurts children and their parents don't protect them.

Sometimes, the abuse may leave physical scars. Other times the hurt is invisible. But the pain is always real.

People sometimes talk about four kinds of child abuse: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect.

PHYSICAL ABUSE is when a child is hit, punched, slapped, whipped, beaten, or burned -- and injuries occur. These injuries may be bruises, burns, scratches, broken bones, bleeding or other kinds of hurts to the body.

SEXUAL ABUSE is when an adult or older teenager forces, threatens, or bribes a younger person into any kind of sexual contact. This contact can include undressing, sexual touching, or intercourse ("having sex").

EMOTIONAL ABUSE is when children are made to feel badly about themselves *a lot of the time*. This can happen when parents call them names, purposely embarrass them in public, threaten to hurt them, lock them in a closet, or don't talk to them for days at a time.

NEGLECT is when a parent isn't willing to provide the things that children need to be safe and healthy, like food, clothing, a place to live, or medical care. When parents leave children alone for long periods of time or kick them out of the house, that can also be neglect. It's not neglect when parents can't provide things for their children because of lack of money. But it is neglect when parents won't accept help so that they can provide these things for their kids.

DISCIPLINE OR ABUSE?

Child abuse is not discipline. Child abuse happens when punishment becomes extreme or when an angry parent loses control and takes it out on a child.

Here's what some kids have said about the difference between discipline and abuse:

Discipline shouldn't leave you bruised or hurting really bad. A spanking may sting, but it's not a lasting hurt.

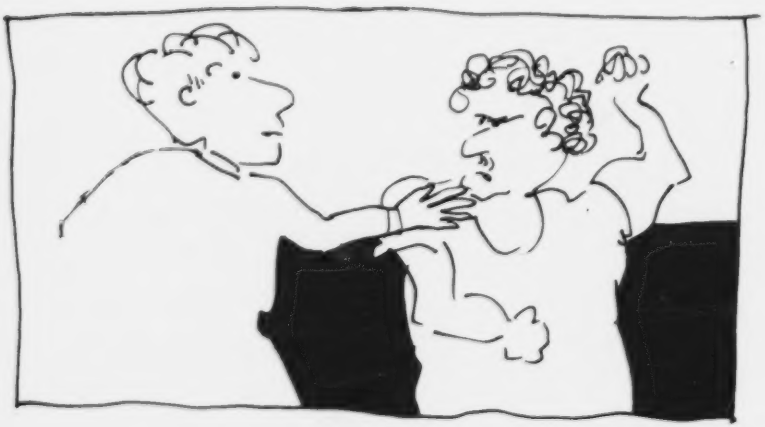
The purpose of discipline is not to hurt you, but to teach you a lesson, to help you, to let you know you did something wrong. In child abuse, you don't have to do something wrong. It's not for a good reason but just because your parents had a bad day or you got in their way.

For discipline, a child can forgive and forget. Child abuse leaves a scar in the memory for a long time.

Adults have different ideas about the best ways to raise kids and to teach them right from wrong. Some parents are more strict than others and have more family rules. The way your parents treat you probably depends a lot on the ways that their parents treated them.

You may not like some of your parents' ideas about raising kids and discipline. You may decide that you don't want to raise your kids that way. But society says that parents can choose how to raise their children -- unless the children are being seriously hurt.

When punishment is unusually severe or leaves bruises, then it's no longer discipline. It's child abuse, and it should stop.



SEXUAL ABUSE

Because sexual abuse involves sex, some people find it especially hard to talk about. But, like other kinds of abuse, sexual abuse happens when a young person is mistreated by someone who is older, or bigger, or more powerful. Like other kinds of abuse, it can make people feel badly about themselves and their body. Unlike physical abuse, sexual abuse usually hurts the way people think about themselves more than it hurts their body.

Both boys and girls can be sexually abused. Most often the abuser is someone they know and trust -- a parent, a brother or sister, a relative, or a family friend. Sometimes, the abuser is someone they know only a little or don't even know at all. When sexual abuse occurs between members of the same family, it is called incest.

Sexual abuse can be especially confusing because touch and attention can also feel good.

I used to like it when Daddy payed special attention to me. He'd let me sit on his lap, and he'd come into my room at night and hug me. But then he started to do stuff that I didn't like. He said it was my fault because I used to let him.

Patty, 15

Often, the abuser bribes or threatens the young person being abused.

My step-father says that if I don't let him sleep with me any more, he's going to have me sent away. He says that all families do this and that I'm just being a baby. He says that if I loved him, I'd want to do it with him.

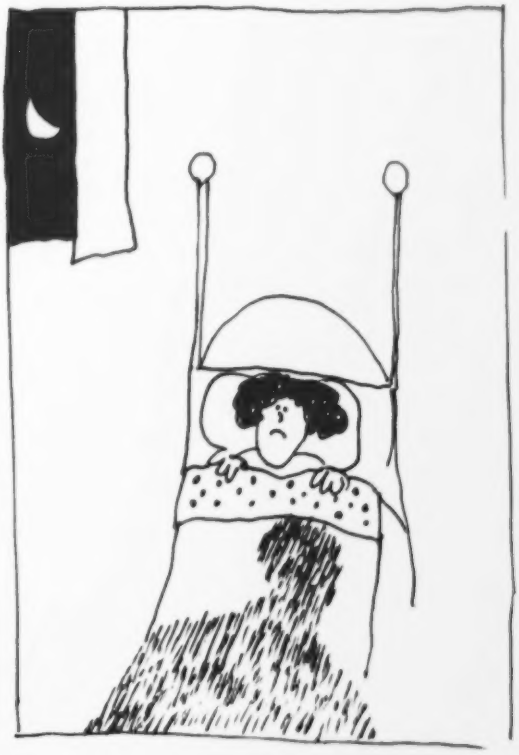
Anne, 13

It was really weird when my uncle touched me. He said it would be our secret, and that no one would get hurt if I didn't tell. I hated what he was doing, but I didn't want anyone to think that I let him do it.

Brad, 14

No matter what, if you are being sexually abused, it is never your fault.
Everyone has the right to choose who to hug, kiss, and touch. You have the right to say "no" to anyone who is touching you in a way that makes you uncomfortable.

When your right to privacy is not being respected, it is important to tell someone you trust -- and to keep telling people until someone agrees to help you.



12 IN WHAT KINDS OF FAMILIES ?

Child abuse occurs in all kinds of families. It doesn't matter what the color of their skin or how much money they have or where they live. It happens in big families and in families with only one child. It happens to both boys and girls.

In some families, all the children are abused. In others, only one child is the victim. Sometimes, the non-abusing parent doesn't know about the abuse, (maybe because he or she is away a lot). Other times, the parent knows about the abuse but doesn't know what to do about it, or is afraid to do something about it.

Parents who abuse their children are not cruel monsters. Most love their children and want to do what's best for them. But many parents never had the chance to learn how to be parents. They never had the chance to learn good ways to deal with their own stress and frustration. When they reach the breaking point, they may strike out at their children, take advantage of them sexually, or ignore their needs.

Mostly, we learn how to behave from the way we were treated when we were young. Many parents who mistreat their kids were mistreated by their own parents. Hitting and screaming may be the only ways they know to express anger or fear or frustration. Some parents believe that hitting children is the only way to change their behavior.

Pa's always talking about how he got whipped when he was little. He says that's the only way to make sure that kids grow up right and stay out of trouble.

Brian, 13

Parents who abuse their children may be angry or upset at someone else --such as the other parent or a boss-- but not know how to deal with these feelings. They may be unable to cope with not having a job or enough money or the kind of life they had hoped to have. Sometimes, they blame their kids for this.

Whenever anything goes wrong, like there's too many bills and not enough money, Ma takes it out on me. She says that she wouldn't have these problems if I'd never been born.

Louis, 15

My mom blames me for my Dad's leaving. She used to just yell at me a lot. Now she grabs me by the hair and smacks me around. Last time, she threw me against the wall for forgetting to buy milk. I couldn't see straight for hours. She says that she's just trying to keep me from turning into a no-good, lying, cheat like my Dad.

Lisa, 12

Some parents don't know what to expect from kids. Growing-up can be hard for kids. It can be hard for their parents, too. As kids get older, they meet more people, make more friends, and often want to spend less time with their families. They may question their parents' ideas and values.

Some parents have trouble dealing with these changes. They see their kids making the same mistakes that they made when they were growing up. They may feel scared and want to protect them. But they may not know good ways to talk about their fears and hopes for their children. In some families, arguments always end with someone getting clobbered.

Most adults who abuse or neglect their children don't feel very good about themselves. Even though they are grown-up on the outside, they may still feel small, and powerless, and unlovable on the inside. They may hit or take advantage of someone smaller to try to make themselves feel more powerful.

Whatever the reason for the abuse, parents who hurt their children need help to stop. They need help to find ways to deal with their problems so that they don't hurt another person.

HOW DOES BEING ABUSED AFFECT A KID?

Abuse and neglect affect the way kids see the world, other people, and themselves. Many people who have been abused find it hard to like themselves or to trust other people. They learned as children to expect very little from others except pain. They may find it hard to believe that people could really care about them.

Children learn about themselves and the world by what happens to them as they grow up. Our self-image -- how we see ourselves -- is like a score card. We keep track of all the nice things people say about us or do for us on the plus side. We keep track of all the bad and hurtful things on the minus side. When the plus side is bigger, we generally feel good about ourselves. When the minus side is bigger, we feel pretty rotten. Everyone has "minus days" some of the time. But kids who have been abused have almost all "minus days" and very few "plus days."

When we hear something over and over again, we start to believe it. Kids who are treated as if they are unimportant, start to feel unimportant. Kids who often hear, "you stupid, worthless jerk" start to tell themselves the same thing. Most abused children grow up thinking that the abuse was their fault: "I did something wrong. I deserved what I got." They may think that no one could like them -- and may start to act like this is true.

Most people who have trouble at home or in their families show it in other parts of their lives. They

- may be unable to concentrate at school or work
- may not see or hear what's going on around them
- may get into arguments or fights because they are worried or angry
- may be very quiet and try to become "invisible".

Kids who have been abused are often afraid and angry a lot of the time, but they may show their feelings in different ways.

I got tough real young. I used to be scared when my old man would come in drunk and start throwing things around. But if I cried, he'd beat me, too. By the time I was eight, I wouldn't even flinch. Now, nobody and nothing can scare me.

Willy, 15

My uncle was always trying to touch me in ways that I didn't like. I hated it, but I was afraid that I'd get in trouble if I made a fuss. So I'd just be very quiet and pretend not to notice, hoping that then he would just leave me alone.

Beth, 13

Many people keep their real feelings inside, and show different feelings -- like acting tough when they are scared, or being very quiet when they are angry. Kids who have been abused or neglected often learned that showing their feelings got them into trouble. They may think that it doesn't matter how they feel. People who are not used to talking about their feelings can find it hard to figure out how they feel and to find the words to describe it.

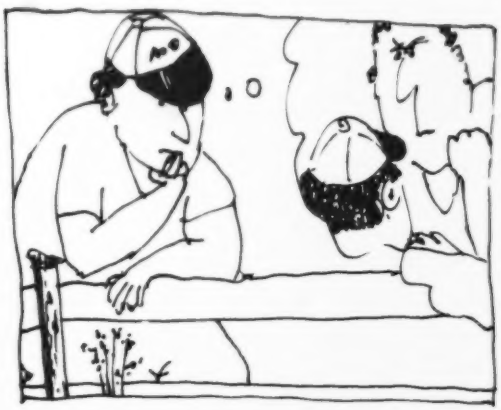
AM I ABUSED?

If things are not so great in your family, you may be asking yourself, "am I abused?". There's no easy answer for this. But if things in your life are hurting or confusing you, it's a good idea to check it out with an adult whom you trust.

IF:

- punishments are leaving you bruised or scared,
- you're getting hit for no apparent reason,
- someone is touching you in a way that makes you uncomfortable,
- someone is trying to force or trick you into having sex,
- you're kicked out of the house or left alone for days at a time,
- you're often made to feel badly about yourself,

then it may be abuse, and it's important to talk with someone about it.



If you think you're being abused, the most important thing to do is TELL SOMEONE!

Think of an adult that you trust. This person could be a:

teacher
school counselor
coach
minister
rabbi
priest
school nurse
doctor
relative
neighbor
friend's parent
youth group leader
your other parent

Sometimes it may be easier to tell someone you don't know, such as a:

telephone crisis hotline
mental health counselor

(The last section of this booklet tells how to find the phone numbers for these places).

The important thing is to tell someone who can help you to decide if what is happening in your family is abuse. This person can tell you what kind of help you might find in your community or can help you to find out. They may even be able to help you call.

There are a lot of reasons why it can seem scary to talk about the abuse:

He said not to tell anyone or else ...
I'd lose all my friends if they found out.
I don't want my parents to go to jail.
If she finds out I told, she'll just beat me more.
Things might get worse if he knows I told.
They said I'd get sent to a foster home if anyone found out.
I promised to keep it a secret.
What if everyone thinks I made it up?

Many kids worry that no one will believe them, that their family will be split up, or that their parents will get in trouble.

My father told me that if I told anyone, he would get sent to jail and I would have to live in a foster home. My little sisters would get sent away, too. The whole family would get broken up, and it would be all my fault.

Tim, 13

When I told my mother that my father had been having sex with me since I was eight, she started to yell and scream at me and called me a "lying whore". She threatened to kick me out of the house if I didn't say that I made it up.

Debbie, 15

I figured that no one would believe me if I said that my mother purposely cut me with a knife or pushed me down the stairs. She was always so nice when other people were around. She'd just tell them that I had a good imagination. So I just agreed when she told people that I was clumsy and always hurting myself.

Claire, 12

Keeping painful feelings secret is hard. When we hold anger and pain inside, they keep building up, until we reach the breaking point. It's like a balloon that keeps getting bigger and bigger and bigger -- until one day it pops! Talking with someone else about what is happening can release some of the pain before it becomes too much to bear.

Some kids keep hoping that their parents will change, that everything will be OK. It is important to hope that our lives will get better when things are bad, but usually something has to happen for things to change. Your family can't get help until you tell someone.

You can't just keep all this stuff inside. You have to have enough confidence in yourself to tell someone , and you have to trust that someone will believe you and try to help.

Mandy, 15

Asking for help takes a lot of courage. It means that you've decided that you're not going to put up with getting abused any longer. That's smart. After all, no one deserves to be hurt over and over again.

WHAT IF THEY DON'T BELIEVE ME?

You may not get the help you need from the first person you tell. Some adults don't know how to help kids who have been abused. They may decide not to believe you so that they don't have to figure out what to do about it. **Don't give up. It's important to keep telling until someone believes you and agrees to help!**

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I TELL?

It's hard to answer this question exactly. A lot of what happens depends on what has been going on and what kinds of services are available in your community. But in every case, the main thing is to:

-- STOP THE ABUSE
-- GET HELP FOR EVERYONE IN THE FAMILY.

There are special laws and agencies in every state to protect kids. It's the job of people who work in these agencies to try to find ways to help families live together without hurting each other. The next few sections talk about how they do this.

Child abuse is against the law! Every state has laws to protect children from dangerous situations and to help parents to make a safe home. These laws define child abuse and neglect and set up ways for families to get help.

CHILD ABUSE HOTLINE

In most communities, there is a free 24-hour number which anyone may call to make a report of possible child abuse or neglect. In some states, all calls are made to a statewide toll-free hotline. In other states, calls are made to the local agency responsible for protecting children. The name of this agency differs from state to state. For example, it is called the Department of Social Services in New York State, the Department of Human Resources in Texas, and the Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services in Florida. Though the names are different, the agencies all have the same job: to protect kids and to help families.

The law says that certain people must make a report if they think that kids are being hurt by their parents. In most states, these are people who work with children such as teachers, doctors, nurses, and police. Anyone else, including kids, can call the hotline, too.

CALLING THE HOTLINE

When the hotline gets a call, they take the information from the person making the report and ask a child protective caseworker to see if the report seems true. The caseworker will talk with the children, the parents, and the person who made the report. The caseworker might also talk with other people who know the family, such as a neighbor, teacher, or doctor.

First, the caseworker will make sure that the kids are safe. If it seems that the kids may be hurt if they stay at home, the caseworker will try to arrange for them to stay with relatives or friends. If there is no safe place, the caseworker may arrange for the kids to stay in a foster home until their parents can get the help they need. Except in the most dangerous situations, going to a foster home is not very likely.

During the investigation, the caseworker will look to see what happened, how often it happens, how serious it is, and what kind of effects it has on the children. The caseworker must decide if the kids are being abused or neglected. If it seems that the children are being hurt, the caseworker will try to get the parents and kids the help that they need. Kids will have the chance to tell the caseworker what they would like to see happen. No one can promise that this is what <u>will</u> happen, but the caseworker will try to help.

After the hotline is called, a caseworker will:

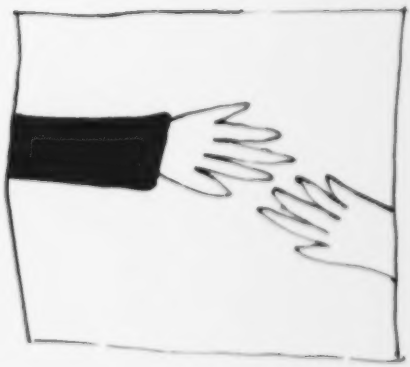
- **talk to people to see if the report seems true,**
- **make sure that the kids are safe,**
- **offer parents and children the help they need.**

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE PARENTS?

If it seems that the parents are abusing or neglecting their children, the caseworker will develop a plan and suggest services that would be helpful. This might be counseling, financial help, a drug or alcohol program, or a parenting program.

Many kids worry that if they tell that they are being abused, their parents will have to go to jail. If parents don't want to cooperate or won't stop hurting their child, the caseworker may go to a family or juvenile court to ask a judge to require that they get help. The purpose of family or juvenile court is to get help for the family, not to send the parents to jail.

If what was done to the child is a crime (such as sexual abuse or severe physical abuse), the case may also go to a criminal court. But even when courts are involved, the purpose is usually to make sure that things are done to help protect the kids, not to send the parents to jail.



Kids have the right:

...not to be abused and to get help if they are being abused.
... to be treated with respect
... to ask questions and to have them answered.

If you don't understand what's going on, ask questions. And keep asking questions until you do understand. If you think you're not being treated with respect, say so -- nicely.

People are there to help you. But they can help only if they know what you need. They may seem busy or rushed, but you have the right to know what's going to happen. They may not be able to help you the minute you call, but don't give up. You can explain that you have questions and ask them to call you back.

Kids also have responsibilities:

... to tell the truth about what's happening.
... not to take advantage of the system.

It's your responsibility to talk about what's been going on and what you want to see happen so that you and your family can get the help you need. Otherwise, the people who can help you won't know how to do so.

It's also important to remember that reports of child abuse are serious. The child protective system is there to help kids grow up safely, but it should not be misused. Making a report is not a way to try to "get back" at parents because you had an argument, or think they have too many rules, or because you want to live somewhere else.

CHOICES AND CHANGES

Change is scary. Sometimes, even being hurt seems better than change. At least we know what to expect. Change means facing the unknown. It means telling yourself that things aren't right in your family. It means taking charge of your life.

No one can force another person to change his or her actions. But we can take charge of how we act. Here's an example: if you are being hurt, it makes sense to feel angry. But you can decide what to do with your anger. You can decide how to act. Hitting another person, getting in trouble, or trying to hide are not good solutions. It's O.K. to **feel** mad, but you can decide to **act** in a way to make things better. This may mean talking to your parents about what is upsetting you. It may mean agreeing on new rules about how you will act and how they will act. It may mean asking someone outside your family to help.

If you are being abused and you tell someone, things will change. Many times, your family will get the help it needs, and the abuse will stop. Sometimes, you may have to give up on your parents and stop trying to make it work out. You may never be able to have the kind of family you want. But you can have a life where you're not being hurt all the time.

FEELING TRAPPED

Sometimes the world just seems too hard to take. People are always coming down on you. Nothing you do is any good and no one cares who you are or what you think.

Tommy, 14

Everybody has times when life is rotten. Problems seem to pop up faster than you can count them. It's hard to see any solutions, and it can seem like things will never get better. But things usually do get better. That's the way life is.

Sometimes, though, our problems get too big or the rough times go on for too long. We may feel trapped. It can seem like the problems are running our life, and that no one cares.

Sometimes, when life seems too painful, people stop caring about themselves. Rather than looking for a solution to the problem, they may try to find ways to "escape". Some start drinking or using drugs to try to make the pain go away. Others think that running away or killing themselves is the only way to make the abuse stop.

I'd just pretend to be asleep when my step-father came into my room at night. I'd stare at the ceiling and go someplace else in my mind. But it finally got so that I couldn't take it any more. So I just split.

Sarah, 13

I figured if my parents couldn't stand me, who else would? Ever since I was little, I knew it was best if I dealt with my problems myself. When that got to be too much, I finally tried to kill myself. I just couldn't stand getting hit anymore and I didn't know what else to do. *Rick, 15*

Unfortunately, drinking, using drugs, or running away create new problems that are as big as the ones at home. The abuse and pain don't go away. Kids get labelled as trouble-makers. They are seen as "offenders" rather than "victims". Their behavior, not their parents' abuse is seen as the problem.

Thinking about running away or hurting yourself is scary and can make you feel even more alone. If you feel this way, it is important to talk about it with someone you trust. See the list on page 19 for ideas about people who can help you find other solutions.

There are no magical solutions to problems, especially problems that involve the entire family. Change takes time -- it won't happen overnight. But there are things you can do to make your life a little bit easier right now. These things are useful ways of coping with many kinds of problems and stress, not just abuse.

-- Say "no!"

We all have the right to set limits on who can touch our bodies, when, and in what ways. When other people violate your right to privacy, you may need to say "no" and to keep saying "no" until they listen.

-- Stay out of the way

When you know that things are about to explode, it may be a good idea to go somewhere else until they calm down. You might spend more time out of the house or in your own room.

-- Do things that make you feel good

Some people make it a habit to do at least one thing every day that makes them feel good. This might be a hobby, going to a special place, writing in a journal or diary, exercise (like running, biking, or swimming), playing with a pet, or being with a good friend. You can make your own list.

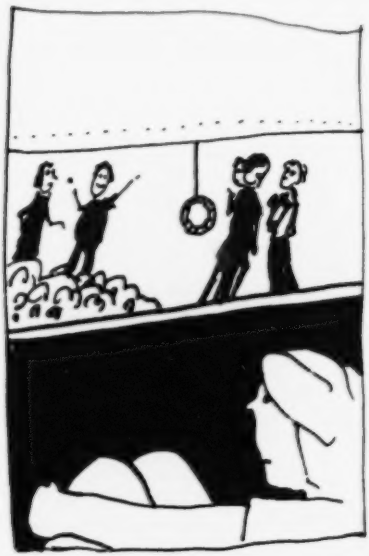
-- Talking it out

Talking with someone else is one of the best things you can do when you're feeling stuck. Another person may be able to see something you can't because you're too close to the problem. They may be able to make suggestions and to help you carry them out. Sometimes, just talking can help you feel less alone.

Some people would rather talk to friends when they have a problem. Others find it easier to talk with someone who doesn't know them. Some places, like a telephone hotline, won't ever need to know who you are.

Friends, especially those who are good listeners can be a great help. But it's also sensible to realize when one needs special help from someone who has been trained to listen and to help in ways that friends can't, such as a counselor at school or in a mental health clinic. Some people like to talk in a group where everyone has been in a similar situation. They find it helpful to hear how other people have solved their problems. (Some places to find a counselor or a group are listed on the last page of this booklet.)

Even if the abuse has stopped, it is important to keep talking about it. The abuse may stop, but the pain inside you won't go away by itself.



FINDING HELP IN YOUR COMMUNITY

The best way to get help is to talk to an adult you trust. Look at the list on page 19 for ideas. If you still can't think of someone to tell or if these people won't believe you, you may be able to get help from one of the places listed on page 41. Every city or town has places that offer help and information to kids and their families.

You can call these places yourself to find out what kind of help they can give you. Some programs won't even ask your name. Many are free or can make special arrangements if it will be hard for you to pay.

To find the phone numbers of the services listed on page 41 or to find out about other services in your community, look in your phone book. Many phone books have a community services page at the beginning. In others, the services will be listed by name in the white pages. If you can't find the number you want, call the operator for help.

REMEMBER:

-- Ask the program what kind of help is offered. Make sure you understand what you need to do to get help.

-- If the program can't help you, ask for the name and number of other programs that can.

-- Someone may not be able to help the minute you call, but **don't give up!**

One of the best ways to help someone with a problem is to listen.

Being told about a serious problem can feel scary for you. Many people worry about "saying the wrong thing" or "blowing it". It may help to remember that it's not your job to solve your friends' problems. But you can help them to figure out who to tell and how to tell it. You can offer to go with them or to help them practice what they want to say.

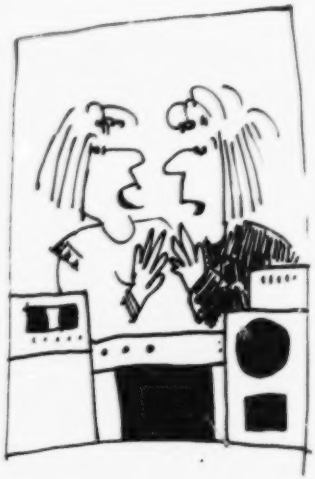
Some kids have offered the following suggestions about how to help a friend:

- **Don't laugh or tell them they're crazy.**
- **Let them know that you care, that you still like them.**
- **Let them know they can trust you not to tell everybody.**
- **Let them know you still want to be their friend.**
- **Help them to tell an adult.**

It's not cool to talk about the abuse all the time. Don't just satisfy your own curiousity about "what it was like". Being a friend means letting them choose how much they want to talk about it and when.

Andrea, 15

Listening to someone talk about being abused can be hard and confusing for you. You don't need to keep it to yourself. But don't just gossip with other kids, either. Find an adult that you like and trust and talk with them.

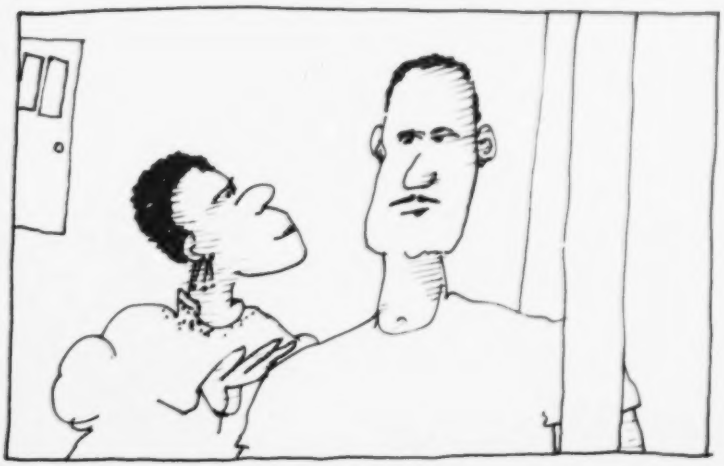


There are many ways that parents and kids can work together to stop abuse.

As children become teenagers, families must adjust to changes that affect everyone. Kids may find that they want more privacy or a greater say in decisions that affect them. Parents may find that they expect their kids to take greater responsibility around the house. Often, however, nobody talks about the changes. When people's needs aren't being met, fights may result.

-- Parents and kids need to learn to listen carefully. Take the time to try to understand what everyone in the family is saying and why. Give each person a turn to talk about the changing needs in your family. Try to be as clear as possible.

-- Listening won't solve every problem. Sometimes, conflicts occur because people want different things. One way to resolve a conflict is to give everyone a turn to say exactly what is making them angry; what behavior needs to change; what solution will be acceptable. Be as specific as possible.



-- Think about how decisions are made in your family. Some families try to set rules and limits together. After agreeing on what is reasonable, they write up a contract which states exactly what the rules and limits are. To be useful, a contract must be specific, stating what the family rules are and what will happen if they are broken.

-- Everyone gets angry sometimes. Maybe it's just been one of those days when everything has gone wrong. If people aren't careful, someone else may "get it." For times like these, make a list of things to do when you're really upset -- besides taking it out on other people. Here are some starters:

Stop and count to ten.
Go for a run, or a walk around the block.
Hit a pillow.
Go into your room and scream or cry.

Then, come back. Talk about the problem and figure out what can be done to solve it.

-- Sometimes, a trained counselor can provide some extra help to family members trying to figure out new ways of solving conflicts. (See page 41 for places to find such people).

-- Finally, praise yourself and each other for things that have been going well. Trying to change the way people in a family act with each other can be hard work. Remember, your family has been acting one way for a long time. Making changes will take some time, too.

-- Invite someone from your local child protective agency to talk to your class or group about how child abuse cases are handled in your community.

-- Many communities have a group for the prevention of child abuse. Invite someone from this group to talk about what they do and how kids can get involved.

-- Find out what services are available in your community for kids and their families. Put together a "resource book" listing the services and their phone numbers.

-- Write to the National Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse (332 S. Michigan Ave., Suite 950, Chicago, Illinois, 60604). They can send you more information about child abuse.

-- For information specifically about adolescent abuse, write to: Adolescent Abuse, Communications and Public Service, Boys Town, Nebraska , 68010.

telephone number

CHILD ABUSE HOTLINE _____

INFORMATION AND REFERRAL SERVICE _____

CRISIS HOTLINE/SUICIDE PREVENTION _____

YOUTH BUREAU _____

MENTAL HEALTH CLINIC _____

ALCOHOL OR DRUG ABUSE SERVICE _____

PLANNED PARENTHOOD _____

FAMILY COUNSELING SERVICE _____

RUNAWAY YOUTH PROGRAM _____

TOLL FREE NUMBERS

National Runaway Switchboard 1-800-621-4000
Runaway Hotline 1-800-231-6946
In Texas 1-800-392-3352
Childhelp USA 1-800-4-A-CHILD
Parents Anonymous 1-800-421-0353
In California 1-800-352-0386

Help is there. Ask for it, and you will find that life can change for the better.

This booklet has been written for kids who are teenagers or who are almost teenagers. It talks about child abuse -- what it is, why it happens, and what you can do about it if you are being abused or know someone who is being abused.

For some of you, this booklet will describe things that happen in your family. If so, it will tell you how to find help. For others, it will help you to understand a little more about the problem of child abuse and neglect. It may help you to help a friend